RSAC 2025 Conference

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The Startup Operating System

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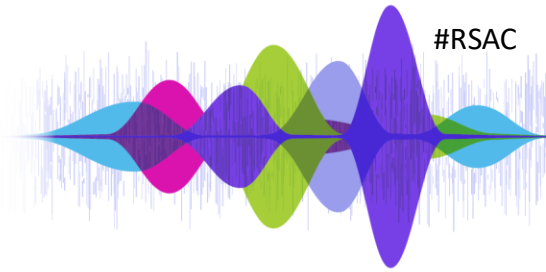

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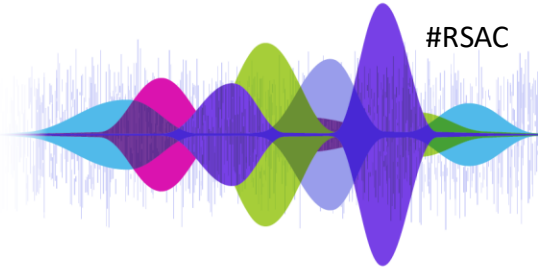
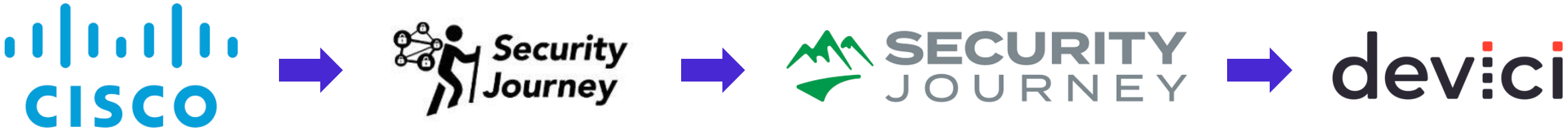
Agenda



- My startup journey
- The "Startup Operating System”
- Expanding on the Subsystems
- Ten actionable tips for startup success

My Startup Journey



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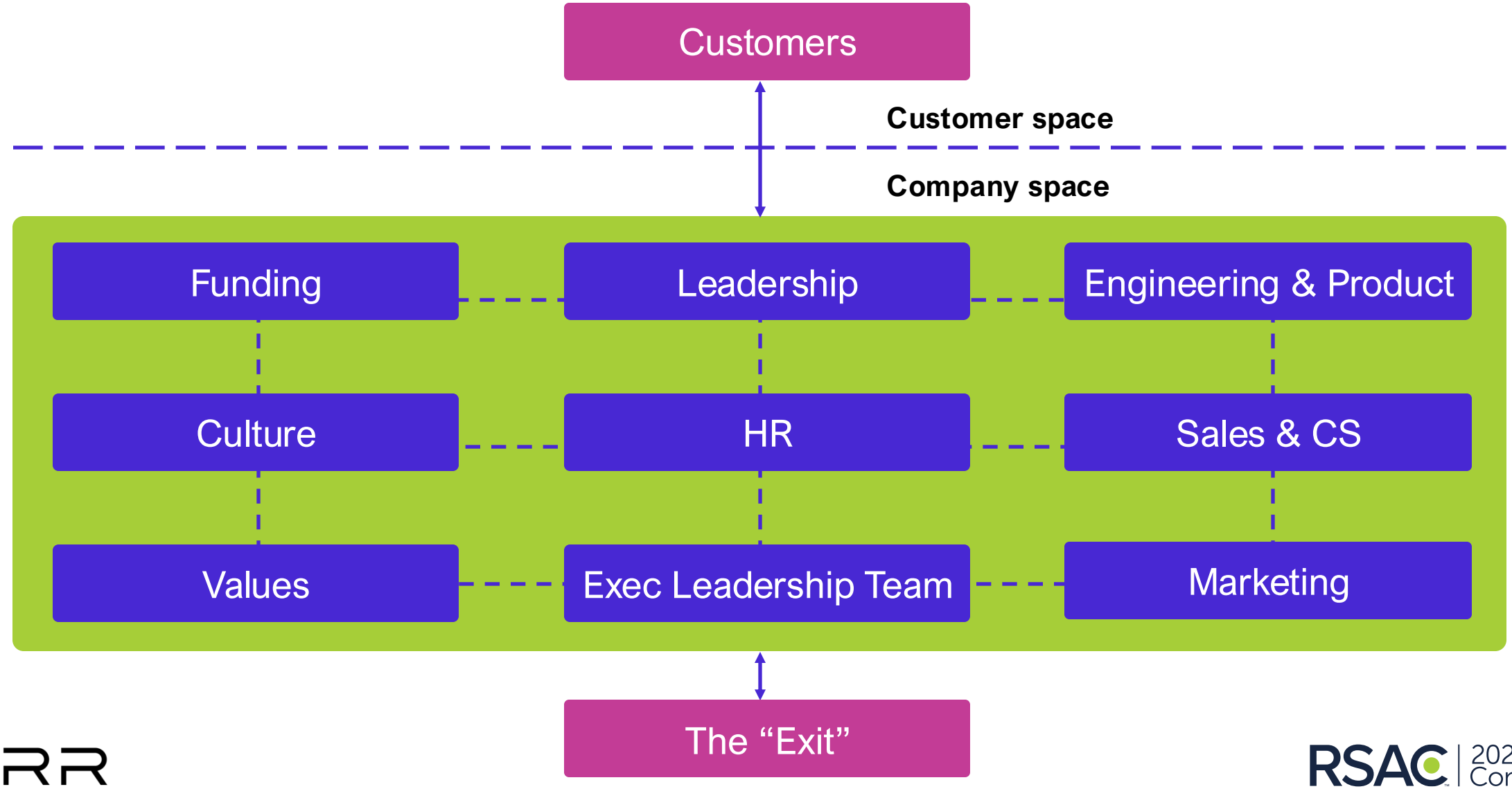
Every bullet point and icon has a story…

I'll share as many as we have time for.

The Startup Operating System

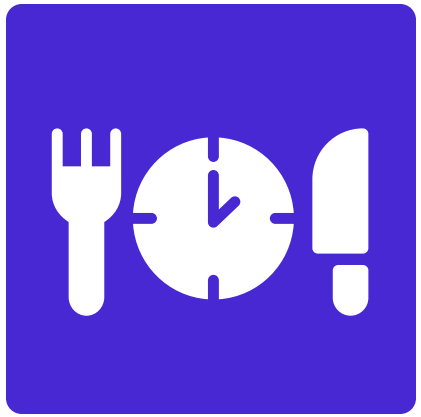


Culture Philosophy

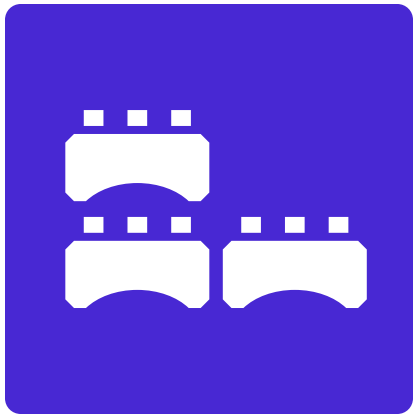
- Build a company you want to work for, built upon transparency and trust.
- The value of a physical space and “manage by walking around.”
- Breaking eggs and solutions, not problems.
- Live the culture because everyone is watching you.

Hands-on Culture

SWAG

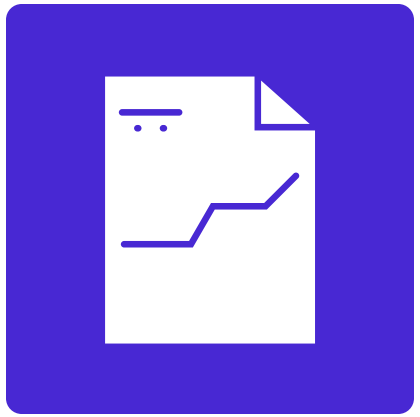


Monday Lunch



Legos

Monday all-hands



Quarterly all-hands

Values

- Invest the time to build your list.
- Share with team members on day one.
- Live them out daily.

1. Put the customer at the center.
2. Think like a security person.
3. Crawl, Walk, Run.
4. Keep it simple.
5. Practice extreme ownership.
6. Have a bias for action and deliver daily results.
7. Balance quick iterations and excellence.
8. Treat money like it’s your bank account.
9. Give away knowledge.
10. Win together.

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Funding

Bootstrapping

Friends & Family / Angel

Venture Capital

Leadership and the “CEO” Philosophy

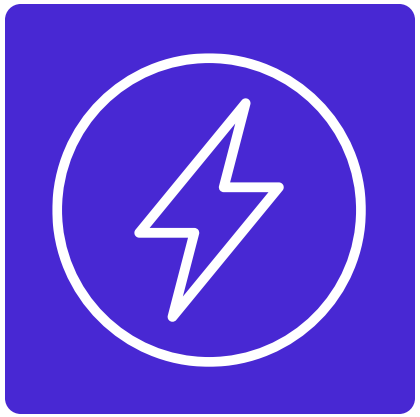
- Without passion, you will fail.
- Founders vs. co-founders.
- Treat others as you want to be treated and listen more and talk less.
- Grow conservatively.

Leadership and the “CEO” Hands-on

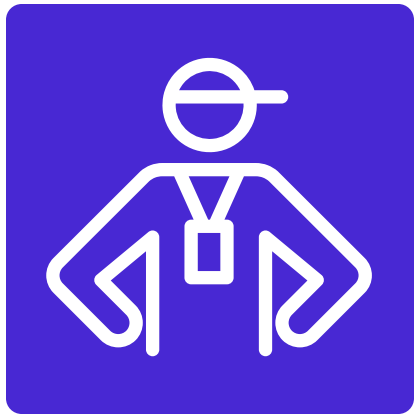
Balance

Flip the table

Dark places



Quickness



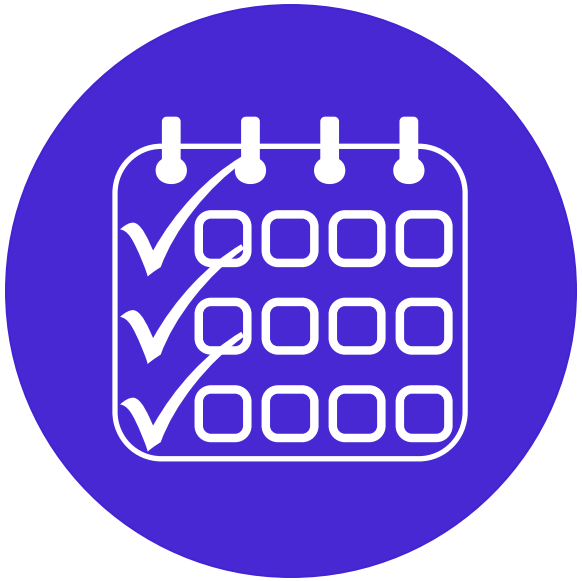
Coaching

Executive Leadership Team Philosophy

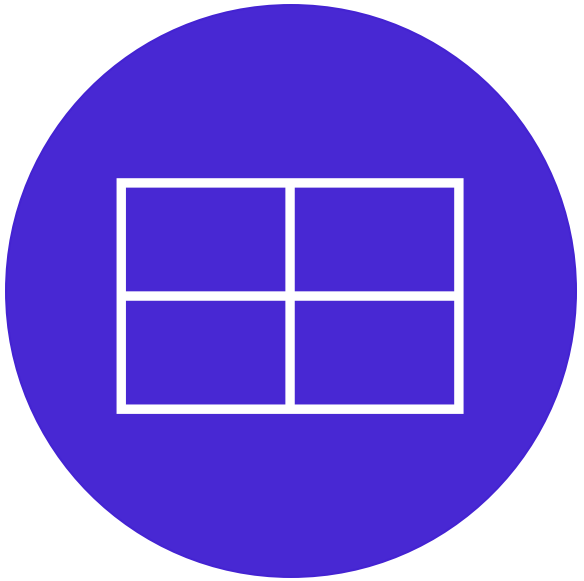
- Hire the best people who are more intelligent than you.
- Avoid micro-management; get out of the way.
- The strength of the ELT will grow the company from $1M to $5M and beyond.

Executive Leadership Team Hands-on

OKRs



Weekly Operational Review

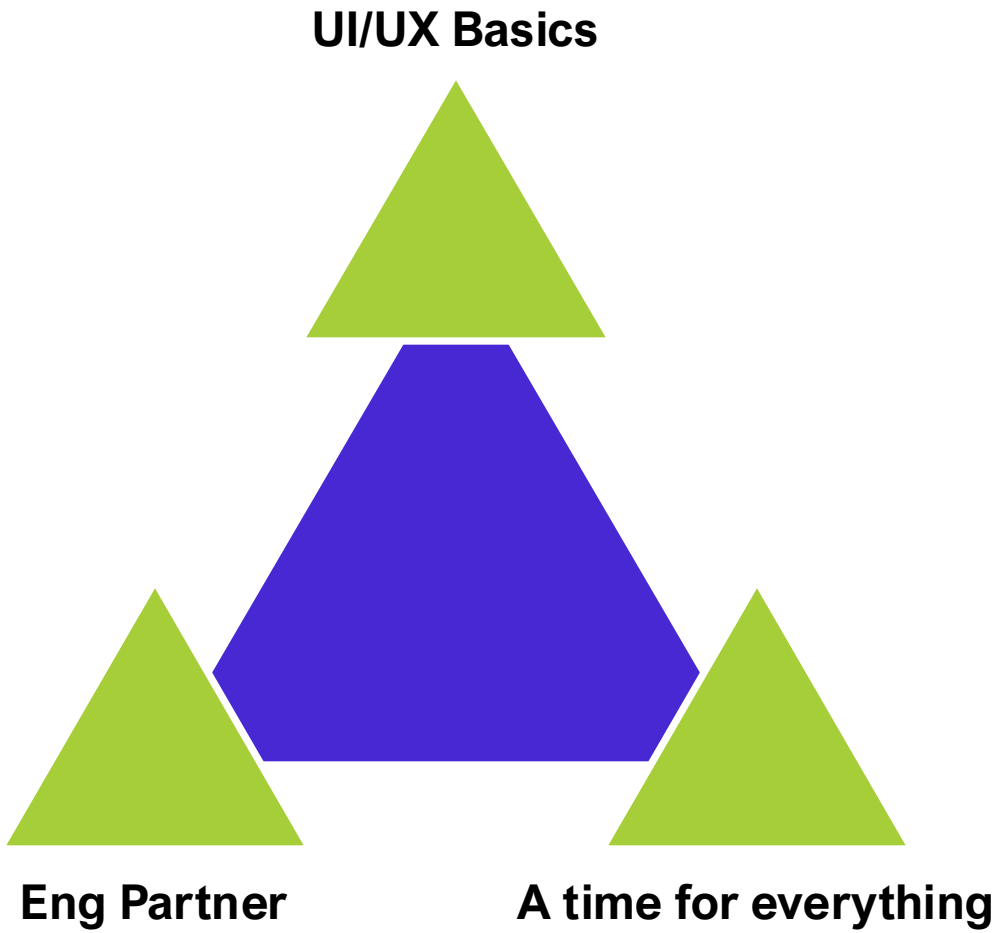


Quarterly Offsite

Engineering & Product Philosophy

Understanding code is a superpower.
You will be the product manager for forever.
Serve the Enterprise or individuals.
Don’t worry about the competition.

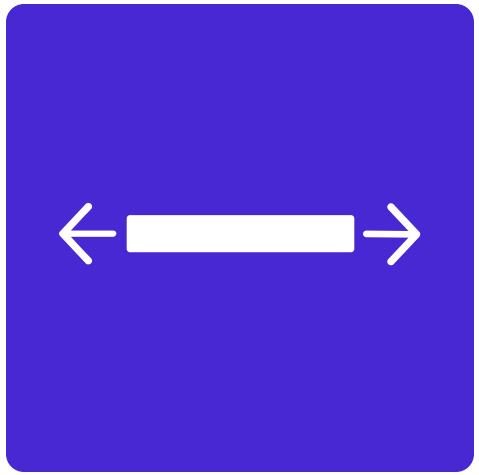
Engineering & Product Hands-on



Sales and Customer Success Philosophy

- You will close the first ten customers.
- Partnerships are a waste of time early.
- Hire two, never one, and become the Sales Engineer.
- CS ensures that the customer uses the product correctly and renews it.

Sales and Customer Success Hands-on



Sales cycle is long

Pricing is almost always wrong

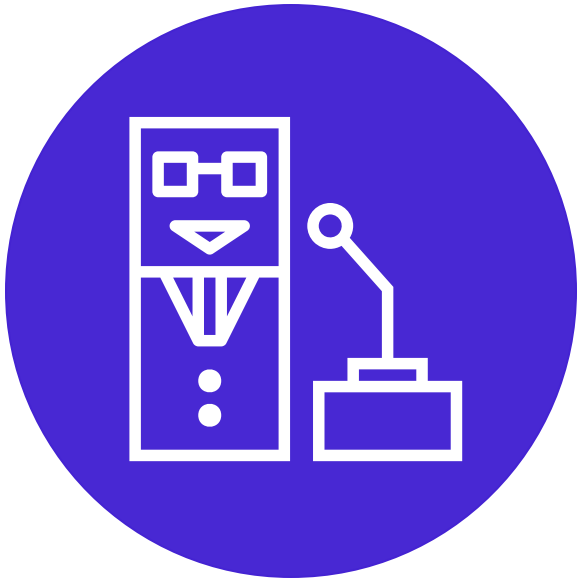
The best salesperson

Customers together

Marketing Philosophy

- Marketing exists to create sales leads.
- The brand is essential with maturity.
- You must minimally spend money to make money.

Marketing Hands-on



Speaking

Podcasts

Booths & Trade Shows

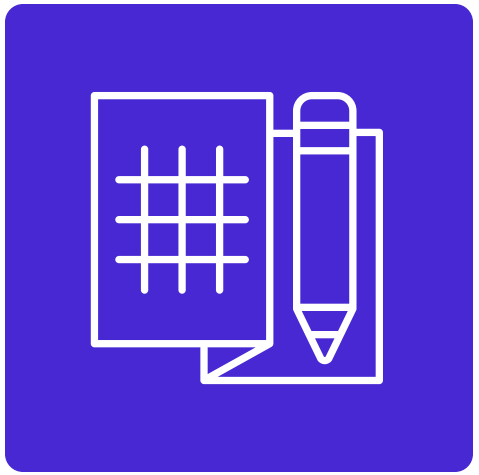
HR Philosophy

- Hire for competence and cultural fit, and don’t discount the cultural fit.
- Choosing new team members is everyone’s responsibility.
- Build from within (Juniors -> Seniors).

HR Hands-on

Interview Process

Employee survey & ACTION



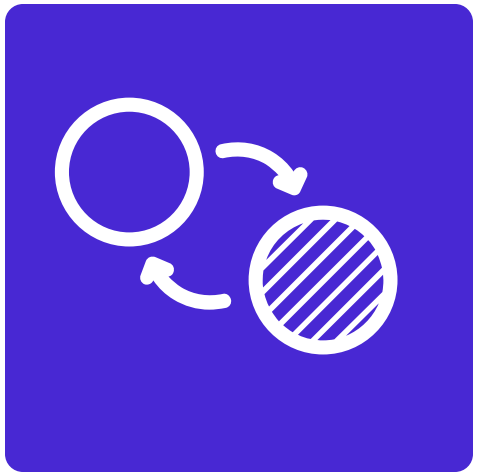
30-60-90 plans for all

The “Exit” Philosophy

- Plan your exit from the beginning.
- Realize that you trade $$$ for the right/ability to run your business.
- We all dream of the “exit,” if negotiated well, it will be a life-changing event.

The “Exit” Hands-on

Investment bankers



Everything will change

Know your role

Sit on the Board

Ten actionable tips

1. Do something you love.
2. Build a personal brand.
3. Care for yourself.
4. Focus on what you can control.
5. Adopt a core vs. context mindset.
6. Shed hats as the company matures.
7. Find a set of exemplary advisors.
8. Fight for your team.
9. Reflect at the end of each year.
10. After you exit, take a sabbatical.

“Apply” Slide

- **Month 1:**
  - Create your own unique "Startup Operating System."
    It doesn’t have to match mine—and that’s perfectly fine.
- **Month 2:**
  - Reflect on the philosophical insights shared, then craft a clear strategy and plan for executing it with your team.
- **Month 3:**
  - Draw inspiration from practical ideas, build on them with your own insights, and mentor someone by sharing your experience.

Key takeaways

- If you have the drive, you can have a startup.
- There will be good and bad times.
- The effort is worth it.
- Learn from my journey – hopefully, some of the hard knocks and happy times resonate with you and will save you some pain.

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For more information:

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